

THE CLAIMS DEFINING THE INVENTION ARE AS FOLLOWS:

1. A tubular casing for use with food products including:
circumferential threads along the length of said tubular casing that become taut at a preset diameter so that said tubular casing has a predetermined diameter when filled with food products.
2. A tubular casing according to claim 1 wherein said circumferential threads comprise elastic threads having a predetermined elastic limit so that below said elastic limit, said threads are elastically extensible and that at said elastic limit said threads become inextensible.
3. A tubular casing according to claim 1 wherein said circumferential threads comprise inextensible threads that are attached to said tubular member so that said threads become taut at a predetermined diameter.
4. A tubular casing according to claim 3 wherein said tubular member comprises a knitted tube with said inextensible threads attached to said knitted tube.
5. A tubular casing according to claim 4 wherein said knitted tube further comprises a circumferential elastic thread extending along the length of said knitted tube.
6. A tubular casing according to claim 1 wherein said tubular casing is a net-like tube comprising spaced circumferential and longitudinal threads.
7. A tubular casing according to claim 6 wherein said circumferential thread comprises an elastic thread having a predetermined elastic limit so that below said elastic limit, said threads are elastically extensible and that at said elastic limit said threads become inextensible.

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8. A tubular casing according to claim 7 wherein said elastic thread comprises a single continuous thread that forms a spiral along the length of said tubular casing.

9. A tubular casing according to either claim 7 or 8 further comprising a tubular fibrous casing located within and co-extensive with said net-like tube, said fibrous casing comprising an inner liner for said net-like tube.

10. A tubular casing according to claim 9 wherein said circumferential elastic threads become taut at a diameter which is substantially equal to the diameter of said fibrous casing when it is filled.

11. A tubular casing according to claim 10 wherein the diameter of said fibrous casing is greater than the diameter of said net-like tube so that said circumferential elastic threads apply compressive force to said fibrous casing as it is being filled.

12. A tubular casing according to claim 11 wherein the diameter of said fibrous casing is between 2 and 4 times greater than the diameter of said net-like tube.

13. A tubular casing according to either claim 11 or 12 wherein the diameter of said net-like tube where said elastic threads become taut is smaller than the maximum diameter of said fibrous casing so that said circumferential and longitudinal threads press inwardly against said fibrous casing.

14. A tubular casing according to any one of claims 9 to 13 wherein said fibrous casing is folded flat with at least one pleat so that its width is reduced to fit within said net-like tube.

15. A tubular casing according to claim 1 wherein said tubular casing comprises a knitted tube that is stretchable and substantially impermeable to said food products and circumferential and longitudinal threads secured to and spaced, respectively, along and around said knitted tube, said knitted tube still being stretchable when

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said circumferential threads become taut so that said circumferential and longitudinal threads press into the surface of said food product so that a quilted-like surface pattern is applied to the surface of said food product.

16. A tubular casing according to claim 15 wherein said circumferential and longitudinal threads are secured to said first tubular portion as it is being knitted.

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A3 → 17. A tubular casing according to claim 15 or claim 16 wherein said circumferential thread is secured to said knitted tube such that it forms a continuous spiral along the length of said knitted tube, said longitudinal threads comprise interlocking loop stitches, each said loop stitch extending between said circumferential threads.

18. A tubular casing according to any one of claims 15 to 17 wherein said circumferential and longitudinal threads are secured to the outside surface of said knitted tube.

19. A tubular casing according to any one of claims 15 to 18 wherein the circumferential thread comprises an elastic thread having a predetermined elastic limit, said circumferential threads are elastically extensible and that at said elastic limit said threads become inextensible.

20. An elastic thread for a tubular casing that is used with food products that has a predetermined elastic limit above which said elastic thread becomes taut and inextensible, comprising:

a rubber thread or a plurality of rubber threads, and

a yarn wrapped along the length of said rubber thread or threads, the number of wraps of yarn along said rubber thread or threads limited so that said elastic thread becomes taut after a predetermined amount of stretch.

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